



Feeding America COVID-19 Recovery Priorities

Feeding America is the largest hunger relief organization in the United States with a network of 200 food banks and 60,000 local faith-based and charitable partner organizations providing more than 6 billion meals last year, up from 4.2 billion in 2019. Our network food banks continue to experience an average 55 percent increase in demand for food assistance. At the same time, nearly 40 percent of those now served at food banks are new to the charitable food system. Feeding America estimates that 42 million people (1 in 8), including 13 million children (1 in 6) could face hunger as a result of the pandemic in 2021. In addition, we are expecting an estimated 30-40 percent decrease in food provided by federal commodity programs. Funding in earlier COVID-19 legislation has helped provide additional short-term food assistance to individuals facing hunger and food banks, but additional food and funds will be needed to help support people facing hunger for duration of the pandemic and economic recovery and beyond.

As Congress works on additional legislation to help families weather this crisis, we ask support to:

- Increase funding for food purchases to support food banks, specifically through an additional \$900 million for food purchases through The Emergency food Assistance Program (TEFAP) until September 30, 2022. Congress should also ensure any additional funding to help support USDA food purchases of commodities impacted by COVID-19 supply chain disruptions are distributed through USDA food distribution programs.
- Extend and expand Summer-EBT, currently operating as Pandemic-EBT, to ensure USDA has the authority needed to continue this important program during summers and for future school closings. Extend and strengthen child nutrition program waiver authority to ensure the flexibility needed to continue operations.
- Address funding shortfall within the network in cold storage and distribution capacity.
- Extend the temporary increases in the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit to provide families with children and working adults.

INCREASE FUNDING FOR FOOD PURCHASES TO SUPPORT FOOD BANKS

In 2020, food banks relied on TEFAP to provide 2.4 billion meals to people in need of food assistance. This amount is expected to drop significantly in 2021 as USDA ends the Food Purchase and Distribution Program. Although the inclusion of funding for TEFAP in prior COVID-19 relief legislation will help, food banks could still see an estimated 30-40 percent decline in TEFAP foods in 2021.

To ensure food banks can meet demand for food assistance during the downturn and recovery, Congress should provide **\$900 million** for TEFAP food purchases through the end of FY2022. Emergency food providers need additional food to meet the unprecedented demand in communities nationwide. TEFAP is the backbone of the charitable food system, and more funding will ensure food banks can continue to meet the need.

In addition, we ask that any additional funds provided to USDA for food purchases to stabilize domestic commodities are distributed through USDA food distribution programs to ensure equity in helping communities in need.

EXTEND PANDEMIC-EBT AND CHILD NUTRITION FLEXIBILITIES

The Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) program allows states to provide resources on an EBT card to participants in free and reduced-price lunch programs when child nutrition programs are closed. This critical program should be extended and strengthened to allow meal resources to be provided during summer breaks and for future school closings when meals are not otherwise available through school and childcare settings. Additionally, nationwide child nutrition waivers issued in 2020 have been critical to helping programs continue operating during the pandemic. The authority for those waivers should be extended to allow programs to better meet the needs of families.

SUPPORT INVESTMENTS IN OUR NATION'S CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE

Across the country shortages of refrigerated and frozen storage space, coupled with insufficient numbers of trucks and other delivery vehicles, present severe challenges as food banks, food pantries and other hunger relief organizations work to meet the needs of their communities. Food banks face this critical and growing gap in cold storage and transportation capacity in part because the cost of storing and distributing government purchased commodity foods far exceeds federal funding provided to cover such expenses. This has left food banks to absorb hundreds of millions of dollars in additional operating expenses each year and resulted in deferred equipment maintenance, delayed vehicle purchases, and canceled capital projects.

We estimate a total cost of \$543,250,000 to meet the most immediate needs for new coolers, freezers, refrigerated and dry trucks, and trailers across the entire charitable food system. In addition to a direct financial investment, the federal government can encourage private support and investment through the expansion of existing tax provisions and the creation of new ones. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these ideas with you in greater detail.

EXTEND THE CHILD TAX CREDIT AND EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT EXPANSIONS

The American Rescue Plan increased the value of the Child Tax Credit this year to \$3,600 for children under age 6, and \$3,000 for those age 6-17. More importantly the credit is now fully refundable, ensuring families with lower incomes receive a greater increase in the amount received, and making the credit available to many extremely low-income families for the first time. It is estimated that these changes will allow the parents of 27 million children to receive the credit for the first time and reduce child poverty by one half.

The Earned Income Tax Credit has also been expanded for this year, with the additional benefits targeted to younger taxpayers without dependents.

We urge Congress to provide continued support to individuals and families most in need of assistance by extending the CTC and EITC expansions beyond the end of this year.